

**Intro:**

Ok, I know I promised you that we would finish Romans 2 today. What can I say? I lied! (But I lied unintentionally!)

So what do you say to that? Based on your understanding of what Paul is saying so far in Romans, can I escape wrath, judgement, and condemnation just because I didn't intend to lie?

You know the answer to that!

We have been working our way through Paul's comprehensive proof of the exceeding sinfulness of man. The state of man is the subject of the introductory chapters.

1. Pagan man = experiencing wrath [this experience is universal among all men]
2. Moral man = subject to judgement by the accusation of conscience
3. Religious man = under condemnation because religion does not eliminate sin

Before we get into any more discussion, I'd like to read our passage:

Read Rm 2.17-29, note v. 25

Title: *A Rite is Right only if Law is not Wronged*

Read Rm 2.25

We begin a new section with this verse, answering a slightly different objection by the Religious Man.

In vv. 17-24, the objection is simply this, I am marked out by my practice of the true religion revealed by God – I'm not like the pagan who rejects natural or general revelation; I'm not like the moral man who merely has conscience for his guide; I'm especially blessed by God because he has spoken to me through the prophets and I know God's will.

The answer to that objection is: yet you still sin – your religion has done you no good, in and of itself.

The next objection (vv. 25-29) could be framed this way:

*Wait a minute... I practice the right rites. You know, the sacrifices, the rituals, and especially circumcision. Circumcision goes back to Abraham! It's the right thing to do, it's the right rite. So I'm right because I practice the right rites.*

The answer to that objection is found in our title:

*A Rite is Right only if Law is not Wronged*

Read Rm 2.25

**Proposition:** The gospel is necessary because no religious form performed by sinning men can please God.

## I. The nature of formal religion

### A. The progress of the argument

1. Paul begins to address the Jew first on the basis of the spirit of revealed religion (17-24)
  - a. He talks about the blessings that derive from having truth revealed from God (the Law) (17-20)
    - 1) Knowledge
    - 2) Discernment
    - 3) Teaching ability
    - 4) Etc.
  - b. He points out that in spite of these blessings, those who hold them and know them still sin (21-24)
    - 1) The people of God, the Jews, cannot escape their sin natures nor God's condemnation simply because they have the truth
    - 2) Professing Christians likewise cannot escape condemnation because it is evident they are still sinners in spite of the blessings they possess
2. Paul turns from the spiritual and internal to the physical and external: circumcision (25)
  - a. Circumcision becomes the defining form that stands for the Jewish position, all its rites and ceremonies, all its law, everything
  - b. The argument goes this way:
    - 1) All right, I concede that in spite of spiritual blessings, we, the people of God, still sin
    - 2) But! But we have the God-ordained signs and rites that distinguish us from the Pagans – God gave us circumcision (and all the other rites of Judaism)
    - 3) Paul is now going to demolish confidence in even these divinely-revealed forms

- B. The tendency of religion to formalism
1. All religions have forms which invest their performers with religious confidence
    - a. Sikhs and their turbans and kirpans, etc.
    - b. Stone-age animist religions and amulets, rituals, etc.
  2. As Christianity developed, it developed forms it called 'sacraments'
    - a. The sacraments are said to 'convey grace'
      - 1) If you are baptized, you get some spiritual benefit
      - 2) If you take communion, you get some spiritual benefit
    - b. Some churches are 'sacramental' – they hold that God gives you grace because you do certain things
      - 1) Some are more sacramental than others... a bit of a sliding scale
      - 2) The Roman church is the most sacramental of all – 7 sacraments
        - a) Baptism
        - b) Confirmation
        - c) Eucharist (communion)
        - d) Marriage
        - e) Holy Orders (ordination)
        - f) Penance
        - g) Anointing the sick / Extreme Unction (last rites – notice the term 'rites')

From the Catholic catechism: "The sacraments of Christian initiation - Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist - lay the foundations of every Christian life. 'The sharing in the divine nature given to men through the grace of Christ bears a certain likeness to the origin, development, and nourishing of natural life. The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life. By means of these sacraments of Christian initiation, they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of the divine life and advance toward the perfection of charity.'"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Taken from a Catholic website: <http://www.christusrex.org/www1/CDHN/baptism.html> (Accessed 11.15.08)

Please note: I am not offering this to ‘bash’ any others, just simply to show what it means to be sacramental, to depend on rites for grace from God.

3. Now, let’s consider Baptists — let’s say even independent Baptists

Question: Is it possible for an independent Baptist Christian to be a formalist?

Knee-jerk reaction: No way, we don’t have any forms.  
... Really?

- a. Baptists have been known to justify themselves by saying, “well, I’ve been baptized”
- b. Baptists have been known to say, “well, I go to church”
- c. Baptists have been known to say, “well, I’ve got the Book”  
(Some even say, “I’ve got the RIGHT Book – KJV.)
- d. Baptists have been known to say, “well, I walked the aisle, I prayed the prayer”

You see, all religion has a tendency to formalism. Your brand doesn’t matter, you can very easily be formal in religion.

## **II. The value of formal religion**

A. The value to the formalist

1. The formalist is not particularly concerned about faith and repentance and the cross because he has his forms
  - a. This is the boast of the Jew: “I’m not an uncircumcised dog of a Gentile”

Essentially, this is the attitude: “The sign of circumcision functions as a protection against God’s wrath since it is the indication that the Jew is in a special covenant relationship with God.”<sup>2</sup>

- b. This is the boast of the Christian formalist as we just discussed
2. There are several ways to bypass the necessity of the gospel (faith and repentance in the work of Christ on the cross)

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, p. 136.

- a. The Pagan says: there is no cross, I don't need God
- b. The Moralist says: I don't need repentance, I'm a good guy
- c. The Religious man, the Formalist says: I don't need the cross, I've got the sign of the cross, I've got my forms

Remember the two men who climbed over the wall in Pilgrim's Progress? Formalist and Hypocrisy. Formalist bypassed the cross because he had his forms, and they were good enough for him.

So the value of formal religion to the formalist is this: If I do the right rites, God will accept me

**B. The value to the realist**

1. The realist understands that God's revealed forms are only symbolic of spiritual realities
  - a. There is a value to circumcision (look at our text)
  - b. The value comes if you keep the law (all of it)

Abraham's circumcision came many years after his justification.

- Justification, Gen 15.6
- Circumcision, Gen 17.23-24 — over 15 years later, Ishmael is 14 at the time

Circumcision was a sign of something, not the agent of something. Circumcision was meant to be a sign of faith, not the agent (producer) of faith.

2. The same is true of all Christian rituals: *A Rite is Right only if Law is not Wronged*
  - a. God's standard is perfection
  - b. If you can stand before him as one perfectly keeping God's standard, your religious rite has some value

### **III. The impotence of formal religion**

**A. The form is invalidated by sin [look at our text]**

1. You transgress the law, it is as if you have never been circumcised

2. Your transgression puts you on the same footing as the Gentiles, under the wrath of God

**B. Christian forms are not superior to Jewish forms**

1. The sign of baptism is intended to point to a spiritual reality of saving faith
2. The sign of baptism cannot be depended on in and of itself
3. The fact of sin in my life invalidates any value baptism might have as a sign of salvation

Remember: A Rite is Right only if Law is not Wronged

This means: all men are doomed.

- The Pagan denies God
- The Moralist depends on his own goodness
- The Religious depends on his ritual and religion

All men are under the wrath of God.

**Conclusion:**

All men under wrath ... except those who are saved.

How?

Since my rites cannot make me right, the basis of righteousness and justification has to come from somewhere else.

My rite has significance if I am perfect.

Who is perfect? Who is sinless?

Jesus Christ

If I can stand before God in Jesus Christ, I stand as righteous. Then my religion has value, but not in the rites I have performed, but in the Son of God who performed them for me.

Are you satisfying yourself with the notion that your religion makes God pleased with you?

You need to satisfy God by forgetting your religion and depending on Christ and Christ alone.